

## Final freeway plan gets another look by SMCAT

[By Doug Murphy](#)

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The South Mountain Loop 202 has become the poster child for everything good and bad in the Valley.

And on Thursday, the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team will meet to begin its review of the freeway's eastern segment, currently planned to replace Pecos Road with what will eventually be a 10-lane freeway.

The meeting, at South Mountain Community College, 7050 S. 24th St. at Baseline Road, begins at 5:30 p.m. and will focus on how the controversial decision to run the freeway up 55th Avenue, which was opposed by the advisory team, was reached by Arizona Department of Transportation Director Victor Mendez.

The advisory team is just that, a group of local people representing various groups like homeowner associations, brought together to advise ADOT on the freeway's design and placement.

Freeway supporters say the Loop 202 must be completed to prevent gridlock on the Valley's freeways and surface streets as people flood into the area. ADOT projects that 150,000 vehicles a day will use the connection from Interstate 10 in Ahwatukee Foothills through a corner of South Mountain Park and back to I-10 around 55th Avenue on the west side.

Opponents say the old 1985 plan needs to be updated to incorporate the realities of growth and development over two decades. They point to the shift of population south into Pinal County, with the growth of Maricopa and other large planned communities, and the growth in the west side of the Valley to support a freeway, but one with a larger reach, connecting to I-10 further south and reconnecting further west.

Other opponents point to the inability of freeways to stay ahead of the rapid growth in the Valley and move people quickly, suggesting that something more efficient could be done with the \$1 billion-plus the freeway will cost.

And quality-of-life issues, including what impact the freeway will have on air quality and to students in the seven schools that are within blocks of the proposed freeway, is fast becoming an important issue for the advisory team and parents, and something that the Federal Highway Administration has never really considered before.

In Ahwatukee Foothills, 255 homes would also have to be demolished to make way for the freeway; some built before the freeway was proposed; others built by a developer in the freeway's right of way when the state couldn't come up with the money to buy the land in 1990s; and others slated for demolition because the freeway is wider than originally proposed in 1985.

Part of the frustration of local residents stems from the on-again, off-again nature of the freeway. Voters approved a dedicated sales tax in 1985 to fund Valley freeway projects, including the Loop 202. But when the economy cooled and sales tax revenues declined, ADOT looked at the concept of the city of Phoenix building Pecos Road as a parkway around South Mountain to accomplish the same transportation goals, but with a simpler solution.

The state also flirted with a possible toll road, funded by a private consortium and built south of Pecos Road. But that effort died in 1997 when the consortium pulled out. In 2004 Maricopa County voters extended the 1985 sales tax for another 20 years, and specifically

included \$1.3 billion for the South Mountain Loop 202, but didn't specifying a route.

Officials say that a draft plan will be made public some time early in 2008. Once public comments have been made final plan will be released, possibly as early as next summer, and then a final decision by the federal government and the state will be made.

If the decision is to build the freeway at least one group has vowed to take the state to court.

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